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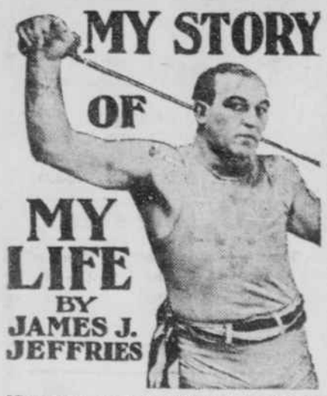
# MY STORY OF MY LIFE BY JAMES J. JEFFRIES





CHAPTER II.

I KILL MY FIRST DEER AND HAVE MY FIRST BIG SCHOOLBOY FIGHT.

I WAS only eleven years old when I killed my first deer. I had the first rifle my father gave me, and it wasn't any toy rifle picked out for a boy. My father didn't care for fancy outfits either for hunting or for fishing. So he gave me a 45-70 Winchester. That gun was big enough to

THE SNAKE WAS CRAWLING SLOWLY AROUND INSIDE THE HEDGE OF THORNS.

kill elephants with, and when I tried it on a quail it didn't leave anything but a cloud of feathers floating in the air. I snapped at a jack rabbit running away from me across the sand, and the whirling bullet took him end on. All I found was his hide and his ears and hind legs.

One fine day a road runner went along the smooth trail ahead of me like a sprinter until he disappeared, and I looked around to see if he had built in a rattlesnake anywhere.

Often in the desert or the mountain valleys I have found traces of a road runner's work. A road runner is a long legged bird. He likes smooth ground where he can take a long running start, and the way he can make those bony legs fly is a sight. A road runner's chief business is killing rattlesnakes. When he finds one asleep he gathers a lot of cactus thorns. Then he builds a circle of thorns all around the snake lying there asleep in its coil, turns all the points carefully in toward the center, steps back a little and begins to make a racket. The snake wakes up, sees the road runner, looks the hedge all over, finds that he can't get through it anywhere and makes up his mind to die on the spot. He strikes himself with his own fangs, and in a few minutes it's all over for the snake. Then the road runner squawks a couple of times, clears away the cactus thorns and has a rattler for lunch.

This particular bird had disappeared. But as luck would have it I happened to find his victim out in the middle of a clear patch of sand. The snake had just awakened, I guess, for he was twisting and crawling slowly around and around inside the hedge. Now and then he'd lift his head high and start to slide across, but as soon as his neck touched the thorns he'd draw back quickly and go squirming around again. There weren't any openings in the fence.

To hurry matters a little I picked up a switch and tapped the rattler over the head with it. He got into a great rage, and in a minute or so he turned deliberately and struck his fangs into his own body down near the tail. He pulled the fangs free and struck again and again, slowly and heavily. I didn't waste any more time waiting to see him die. He was practically a dead rattler then. I didn't want his rattles, because they always said it was bad luck to cut off the rattles of a rattler that had time to strike himself before he died. His blood is full of poison, and if you happen to get it on your knife blade and cut yourself afterward there may be trouble.

I was up in Big Tahunga canyon now, keeping my eyes open for deer. And, sure enough, not long before sunset I ran into two does and a fine buck. They were standing in a group in easy range, right in a little gully.

Up came the 45-70 Winchester to my shoulder. I drew a fine bead on the buck and pulled the trigger. A puff of dirt flew up into the air from the bank just behind my buck, who lit out up the hill. I could hear him crashing through the thickets. The two does tore off into the brush and disappeared.

For a moment I stood there the most disappointed boy in the world. I had been cocksure of dropping my game, and all I had done was to raise the dust beyond him. I followed his trail for a little way in the dusk, then gave it up. He was badly scared at least, and there wasn't a chance that he'd stop running for miles.

When I got back my big brother met me.

"Well, Jim, did you get a deer?" he asked.

"No. I had a chance, but I missed," I said gloomily.

"Are you sure you missed?"

I told him all about it.

"Jim," said he, "I'll bet you hit that buck. We'll go out in the morning and get him."

I didn't feel very optimistic myself, but early next morning my brother and I started up the canyon. When we got near the place where I had seen the deer there were two or three vultures sailing in lazy circles overhead. Looking around, we could see others, high up in the air, coming toward us.

"You got that deer," said my brother. "We're just in time."

Sure enough, we followed up his trail and found him without much trouble. He was hit a little way back of the shoulder.

My father used to tell stories about our fighting ancestors every now and then, but not often enough to excite too much interest. "The Jeffries family was heard of in the Revolutionary war and in the Indian wars," he used to say, "and let me tell you, though they were a quiet and peace loving people, they never allowed themselves to be whipped."

That was the principle I tried to follow. I never picked any fights, but if one started in spite of me I took great joy in not allowing myself to be whipped. The surest way to prevent that was to pound the other fellow until he gave in.

When I was a small boy in the Arroyo Seco school, near our home ranch, there was a bigger boy in the school named Fred Hamilton. Fred and I had some rivalry, although at that time I hadn't grown very tall. He was nineteen years old and weighed about 195 pounds. I weighed about 140, but I was stocky and broad and strong even then.

One day Hamilton and I got into an argument. After a few words he reached over and hit me. Now, my father used to say, "If an enemy smite thee, turn the other cheek." I thought that was all right, but if he hit the other cheek, too, whatever followed was his own fault.

Remembering the Bible lessons at home and these precepts always laid down by my father, I turned the other cheek according to rule.

"Just hit me once more," I said, "and I'll get mad."

He did it.

And then things began to happen. I might not have had a chance with him when we were both on our feet, but I caught him with a hip lock at the first rush and threw him flat on the ground. Before he could wriggle away I was on top, hammering with both hands. I didn't know anything about fair stand up fighting in those days and didn't bother my head about ring proprieties. Everything went. Hamilton couldn't throw me off, and I gave him a fierce beating. His eyes were blackened and his face bruised when I got through. Then I let him up and went back into the schoolhouse. He followed.

Of course there was an investigation on the spot.

"Did you do all this damage?" asked the teacher after taking a good look at Fred.

"I did," said I.

The teacher looked at the big fellow and laughed. The difference in our sizes made it seem ridiculous, I guess. At any rate, teacher wouldn't believe that little Jimmy was the guilty party and refused to punish me.

Hamilton and I had many a good laugh over it years afterward when I

I GAVE HIM A FIERCE BEATING.

had grown up to a man's size, and he didn't mind the idea of having been beaten by me.

On another day a teacher threw a ball at me and hit me on the head. I picked it up and threw it back and hit him on the head, but much harder. I wasn't punished for that, for it was just tit for tat and no favors.

All through my school days I had little scraps, like other boys, but none of them serious. My brother Charles (or Jack) did more real fighting. On one occasion he fought a big boy for a full hour and fairly massacred him. It was a fair fight, all arranged before it began. The other boy had a second, and I seconded Jack. He was a game kid. At first the fight went against him, but he stuck it out until he beat the other boy to a pulp, as the sporting writers always say in the newspapers.

CHAPTER III.

I BECOME AN IRONWORKER AND SEEK THE HARDEST JOBS.

I QUIT school when I was four teen years old and went to the Los Angeles Business college for a year. But that was too light work to suit me. I wanted to do something that would take strength. So I went to work as an apprentice for ironworkers, to learn the trade.

Here my strength came in very good. I mastered the work in no time, and in five months I could handle anything that any man in the shop could work on, so that I was earning piecework, from $5 to $12 a day, as much as any man there, except the boss.

Now, in my seventeenth year I stood six feet or over and weighed fully 220 pounds. The boss had a saying that any man who worked in iron should

I'D ASK THE BOSS TO GIVE ME THE HARDEST WORK HE HAD.

scale at least 200, and my size took his eye. Whenever a job required unusual strength I was picked out for it.

Where a lot of men work together there is always more or less rivalry. We had our wrestling bouts and roughed around a little at noon and when the day's work was over. When I first began working I thought several of the men were as strong as Hercules, but by this time I could more than hold my own with them.

I didn't care to make much of a boast of my strength, and I don't now. It was natural for me to be strong, and I suppose I'd have been a strong man even if I hadn't worked so hard. It was in me. I credited it all to my out of door life and thought that when other men as big as myself lacked the same quality of strength and quickness it was because they hadn't grown up out where the sun would sink into their bones and muscles and the mountain air expand their lungs.

Later, when I was champion, doctors examined me wherever I went and told me that I had "a marvelous reserve of nerve force," which, it seems to me, was just a way of stringing words together to explain something they didn't understand any more than I understand it myself.

One thing is certain. I did have a peculiar kind of strength that came to me only in an emergency. I had two kinds of strength. At ordinary times I was a strong man—stronger for a steady lift or a hard effort of any kind than any of the other men I worked with. But on a few occasions came a different kind of strength coupled with quickness that always amazed me when I sat down afterward to think it over and study out a reason that would satisfy my curiosity. In the course of my fighting career I have met many strong men who rose to the top of their profession by whipping scores of others only a little less able. To the best of my recollection Bob Fitzsimmons was the only one who had this knack or trick I speak of highly developed. Fitzsimmons was a lanky fellow with thin legs and a thin body, but I found when I fought him that when he was almost out he could draw on some hidden reserve of strength and for a few minutes fight with double his ordinary force. Fitzsimmons was a trained fighting man, a veteran, at that time, and of course he may have developed this. But to me it was entirely natural.

When I have been badly battered in a fight it hasn't worried me at all, because I know I am in no danger. When it comes to a showdown I always have that spurt, drawn from some reserve force I don't understand. It has come to me in a way two or three times, although, to tell you the absolute truth, I've never really needed it in the ring, for I've never yet been dazed by a blow or arm weary from fighting.

The first time that this unexplained power ever came suddenly to me was before I took up fighting at all and when I was still working in iron. The company sent a big gang of men out to the Punta oil wells to build oil tanks. That's a man's work, and youngsters aren't needed on the job. But I could do a man's work, and I liked the rough life in the hills.

Building an oil tank is no play. First the structural ironwork goes up, and then the big iron plates are raised into place and riveted one to another to build the sides. Each sheet of iron, like the steel plates on the side of a battleship, is rolled into shape in the works before it is shipped. When you remember that each plate weighs from 800 to 900 pounds and that it has to be fitted so that every rivet slides into its hole like your foot into a tight shoe you can see that putting up an oil tank isn't schoolboy's play.

At the tank I was working on that day we had a big derrick to lift the plates into position. It was made up of a mast 60 feet long and 12 by 12 inches square, supporting a boom of just the same size. The mast was held erect by long guy ropes of twisted steel wire fastened to long iron pegs driven into the ground.

Most of the men were working around the mast and boom, but I was on a staging on the other side heading rivets. I had just finished one and straightened up for a moment waiting for another redhot rivet to be placed. I saw one of the long iron pegs holding the guy ropes of the derrick pull out of the sand with a jerk and go whirling high in the air, the wire guy rope twisting and squirming like a snake. Instantly I knew that the mast and boom were falling. There was no time to run to the ladder. I leaped down to the ground, went to my knees, jumped up like a flash and ran around the tank. As I ran I heard the crash of timbers and the grinding of iron and felt the shock of a heavy concussion. On the other side it took only a glance to see what had happened. The great mast and boom, folded together, had fallen straight over on the half completed tank. The men were standing stock still, staring up at the wreckage. My eyes followed theirs and then for about a tenth of a second I felt sick. There on the scaffolding right over my head lay one of the workmen pinned under the heavy mast and boom—a friend of mine. His name was Kelly. He was bent halfway across an iron plate that had been raised nearly to its position. His head and shoulders and body were on the side toward me.

Everybody, as I said, was stock still and staring. But I didn't even think. I don't know to this day how I ever moved so quickly. The next thing I remember I was at the top of the ladder and stepping on the platform. There was the man pinned under the timbers. In another instant I had my shoulders under them and was straining for the heave. They came up slowly as I straightened my back and legs, up and clear, and then with a final effort I threw them out and sideways to fall crashing on the ground. I fairly tossed them away from me.

Kelly's body slid from the edge of the iron plate and dropped to the ground. As I came down slowly the men gathered around to look at him. They rolled him over to see how near cut in two he was, and to their surprise he groaned. We poured water on him, and after awhile he sat up. It was one of the queerest things that ever happened. He was hurt more by the fall to the ground than by the timbers dropping on him. The tumble nearly broke his neck, while the timbers only squeezed him a little. When the mast fell Kelly was leaning across the edge of the iron plate, looking down. The timbers came right across his back, but just as they reached him

WE ROUGHED AROUND A LITTLE AT NOON.

they lodged against the framework of the tank and stopped short. If they had gone a few inches more my friend Kelly would have been cut in two.

As soon as I saw he was still alive I called four of the men to help me slide the timbers along the ground and get them into position to be up ended again.

A tank builder leads a rough life and hasn't much time to waste on sentiment. Kelly wasn't killed, and the work was lagging.

To my surprise, five of us couldn't budge the timbers. It took eight men, myself included, to move them one at a time, and as far as effort is concerned I'm sure I lifted with as much good will as when I tossed them both off of Kelly single handed. Eight of us did shift them around, and soon they were up again, securely guyed this time, and the work went on.

Mr. Smalley, our boss, was quiet for awhile. Then he took hold of my arm and said: "Well, Jim, you're a pretty husky boy. I've known some strong men in my time, but none that could do what you did. Some of them were as big as you, so it isn't just the muscle. Where do you get it?"

I didn't know, so I didn't answer.

TO BE CONTINUED.

### Philanthropic.

The New York butler caught with $15,000 worth of diamonds in his pocket is thought to have perfected some self-tipping scheme so as not to have to annoy house guests.

### Not What She Meant.

"My husband never gets what he should for his poetry," said the poet's wife with a tinge of sadness. "Oh, don't be too hard on him," replied the girl, absent-mindedly.

### Beware!

Beware of the man who talks of the "solemn truth." Truth wears many colored and joyous rainment; she of the mournful hue is hypocrisy.—Life.

### Smoke Town.

Florist—"Something new and very rare—a black rose." Pittsburger—"Pshaw! We have had them in my town for years."—Life.

### Too Little Regard for Others.

One of the greatest mischiefs of the present day is the spirit of go-as-you-please which prevails.—Walter E. Hansel.

### A Boy and His Bike.

When a boy breaks his own bicycle he breaks his sister's while his is being mended.—Atchison (Kan.) Globe.

### World's Stock of Pigs and Sheep.

It is estimated that the total number of pigs in the world is 150,000,000, and of sheep 580,000,000.

### Skeptical.

It may be that a barking dog never bites, but we refuse to take any dog's word for it.

### The Welcome Friend.

Nothing is there more friendly to a man than a friend in need.—Plautus.

### Hard Lines.

"I tell you, the young playwright of today hasn't any show."

"No; not even a try-out."